

BOOK REVIEW SECTION

Marshall, T.: *The Politics and Ideology of Planning*. Bristol, Policy Press, 2021. 282 p.

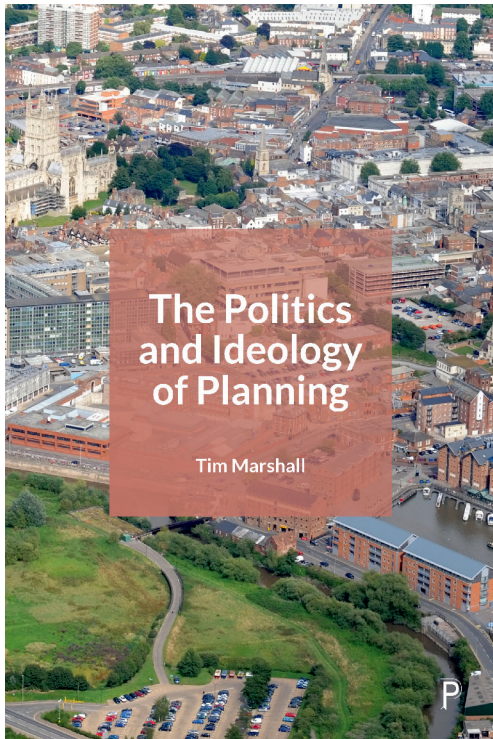
In recurring times of global crises, political-economic theorisations increasingly seek to understand powerful processes that reshape contemporary societies. Economic destabilisation and experienced growing inequalities deeply affect the complexity of social relations and lead to profound ideological instabilities. These turbulent paths shake the validity of hegemonic understandings of politics, economy and society, and often result in the rise of populism. Political scientists eagerly analyse the rise of new dominant narratives, prognosing possible future scenarios that either generate the growth of right-wing Conservatism, the survival of neoliberalism after its hegemonic peak, or else a socialist tide to manage uneven development and take back control on public expenditure.

Tim MARSHALL contemplates specifically the above and takes an endeavour in the course of UK planning from a historical point of view, where periods of po-

litical-economic restructuring left their mark on how the profession is seen as a whole. Even though the book promises a methodological approach to planning, it does more by arguing against its technical nature that dominates the profession. In doing so, the book elaborates on the role of politics and ideology in shaping planning models at all scales. The book employs a compelling approach to engage with debates on both material forces and the role of ideas that shape contemporary planning practices. By bringing the examination of ideology to the forefront of the analysis, it reveals what ideology is, what its effects are, and how it shapes theories of planning. Although the book describes planning processes that apply to the UK, the experienced dynamics are not limited to its territory, but acquires a much broader relevance.

The Politics and Ideology of Planning explores carefully how politics and ideology shape the 'normal' view of planning. The book argues that "planning has been too long buried under various forms of timidity or caution or professional defensiveness" (p. 3). It is separated into 11 chapters, with the first two introducing the topic based on an extensive literature review and explaining the relevance of studying how politics and ideology infiltrates planning throughout history, linking it with a review of British ideologies in Chapter 3. The following two chapters focus on the exploration of British planning history and the role of law in planning. Chapters 6, 7 and 8 highlight the differences of ideology and politics appearing in government, at both central and local level, while also explaining how ideology and politics are becoming more and more detached from the profession of planning via actions of lobbying, pressure groups, or the media itself. Chapters 9 and 10 offer examples with varying levels of ideological load. While heritage, local environment, and design constitute the more cultural debate, housing, economy and infrastructure rather involve structural debates, hence it is the more critical aspect of planning, when hegemonic views can be challenged. Lastly, in Chapter 11, MARSHALL offers ways forward and some guidelines on how to approach a better path of planning that also offers solutions to today's most burning natural and built environment issues.

As the introduction and subsequent chapters demonstrate, MARSHALL instrumentalises a 'double-headed' approach, in which politics and ideology is taken into consideration alongside each other throughout the whole book. Politics is understood both as stemming from pressure politics, but also as the every-



day functioning of state, governments and law. Meanwhile, ideological amalgams are represented in both large historical trajectories and normal, shorter time-scale political processes, which are conditioned by material and cultural forces. Taking the composition of these two, the politicisation and ideologisation of planning are mediated through pressure politics and governmental and state institutions, affecting each field of planning and the scale in which it operates. Altogether, it creates a mix of politically and ideologically affected planning. MARSHALL follows a 'low-theory' political economy approach, as he devotes the book to be at a reduced level of abstraction, and rather focuses on visible realities through 'ordinary' political science. Accordingly, both structural and cultural explanations serve as the basis of inquiry.

In the first half, the book focuses on the development of dominant discourses and narratives. Ideological shifts are taken under scrutiny employing a binary division, comparing what constitutes as classical 'Left' and 'Right' in politics and ideology. More broadly, this refers to progressive, mainly liberal and socialist ideologies on the one hand, and conservative ideologies on the other. The timescale of the investigation stretches from the dawn of the 20th century until contemporary times, providing a historical overview of planning that has been a somewhat neglected attempt in recent undertakings. The *long durée* analysis is separated into five larger periods, which I will pinpoint in the following as four crucial tipping points of capitalist development.

First, the volume covers the birth of planning as a profession, following its brief development from the start of the century, towards the end of the second World War. Foundations were gradually set up, ending in the 1947 Planning Act that functions as a cornerstone of the ideology of planning at the time. The Act regulated that owners could no longer build or develop land without granted planning permission, symbolising the social-democratic approach to planning that characterised the genesis of planning.

Second, the hegemony of neoliberalism is explored, starting in 1979 with the Thatcherite era, when council housing was transferred to commercially driven housing associations as an emblematic moment. The hegemony of neoliberalism started to develop around this time and ended its peak at the global financial and economic crisis of 2008. The conservative ruling that lasted from 1979 towards the end of the 1990s provided a far-lasting challenge to the status quo through introducing a 'fresh' ideological agenda. During this time there was a clear-cut difference among socialist and conservative ideologies. Without doubt, the greatest shift stems from the increasing force of neoliberal ideology that gained ground in both sides of politics, first through Thatcherism after 1979 and later through New Labour after 1997, and only ended its peak at the global financial and economic crisis of 2008.

Third, during the post-1990s to 2010 period the socialist block started to change as well: Tony BLAIR represented this shift in 1994 by laying out the foundations of Third Way politics (GIDDENS, A. 2013). Socialist discourse majorly disappeared from the party and after 1997 from the government as well. The Left waited up until 2015 to bring these discourses back by Jeremy CORBYN with a more interventionist approach. In addition, since the 1960s green ideology and environmentalism also had an effect on politics and were very commonly used from the 1990s onwards, with a mix of feminist and multiculturalist discourses.

Finally, in the latest era, lasting between 2010–2015, conservatives and liberal democrats took the leading role. The major changes included the outsourcing of council planning to the private sector, so instead of locally employed planners working with local councillors, the contractualisation of the private sector removed the possibility for largely any public or community input. Furthermore, harsh austerity measures, centralisation and cutbacks on the responsibilities of local governments characterised this era.

Moving on to the second half of the book, MARSHALL engages with a political-economic approach to look at the structural changes over time. Empirical cases exemplify the spread of entrepreneurial policies, which further included the perception of planning as a merely knowledge-based activity with a technical scope, strengthening the argument that planning can be purely detached from political and ideological dimensions. The centralism of both Left and Right was a heavy driver of this process, especially in the approach to the role of local governments. While the Thatcher conservatism empowered central government on the expense of local governments as independent actors, the 2010s seen the massive slimming down of local government resourcing. Equally, New Labour version of Labourism was not especially sympathetic to local governments, having a similar faith in mind by strengthening the role of the private sector in housing and many other spheres, turning their back to the municipal socialist side of Labourism.

The book defines four major political-economic consequences of 'centralist' politics. First, planning has seen the rise of 'consultocracy' (PARKER, G. *et al.* 2019), reducing the scope of democratic local steering of planning. Mike RACO studied the extensive commercialisation of planning through the management of the 2012 Olympics in London (RACO, M. 2014, 2015), where democratisation in general and public input of elected councillors in particular were weakened from the very early stage of the project development. Second, financialisation unfolded through the restructuring of lobbying by privatisation and deregulation (HARVEY, D. 1982), generating mass amounts of wealth based on a deregulated regime. Furthermore, property plays a crucial part to this system. Thus, planning is one of the major spheres

where the real negative effects become obvious by repeatedly occurring crises. Third, the entrepreneurialisation of planning showed its true colours as large corporations could more and more easily overcome local opposition, or even disregard planning controls, as showed in the case of Tesco's involvement in the planning system through various tactics, popularly known as a David and Goliath struggle (SIMMS, A. 2007). Lastly, the importance of the national level is continuously being reinforced by the pressure coming from interest groups and lobbying, instead of being curtailed or counteracted by it. As a result, the loosening power of the local level over local development is an inherent part of centralist politics.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned processes, the book synthesises the narrative and political-economic side of planning, by distinguishing facets and fields of planning, in which certain developments have a less pronounced ideological character, while some planning matters are more subject to political and ideological pressures, as they are close to core issues of maintaining a capitalist system. There are issues that are non-threatening categories neither to conservatism nor to liberal and left ideologies, which both sides of politics are comfortable to promote. These apprehend to the *zeitgeist* of middle-class interests and typically touch upon localised needs, namely heritage, local environment, or elements of design. As MARSHALL explains, these are not close to the core of capitalist systemic forces, and do not address basic ownership or property structures, or investment conditions. He calls these "other kinds of ideological conditioning" (p. 194) that are close to the perception of cultural changes, involving sensibilities and mentalities. All these elements are related to the culturalisation of urban policies, understandings about nature, places, or cultural heritage, not being necessarily close to dominant growth concerns. Ideological conditioning is less strong in these cases, and short-term politics play a more definite role. However, these are not completely independent from growth concerns, they are also tied up with material forces. The other three fields – housing, the economic sector and infrastructure – imply a greater attention to ideological framings. These issues take a more explicit side when it comes to the question of hegemonic position, whether private provision is the best option, and how goods and services are offered to society. There is a greater scalar change in the decision-making processes of these issues, and all have been going through radical centralisation over the years, losing local control, while the three facets are easier to keep on the local level. Therefore, taking side on how these fields should develop also imply that debates are ideologically more loaded.

In the closing chapters, the book offers an outline of possible scenarios for the post-2020 situation. Borrowing STAHL'S (2019) conception following

GRAMSCI, MARSHALL suggests that there are periods when particular projects are hegemonic, and periods with certain 'interregnums,' in which hegemonic projects are competing with each other. Past the hegemony of neoliberalism, the book resides at a preferable future outcome that involves two crucial elements. As a first element, the need for acquiring a 'radically new imaginary' is highlighted. It incorporates the core values of feminist and green ideologies into mechanisms and values based on socialist ideals. Instead of considering them as a complete formula, these are more fluid over time, developing towards the right direction and right decisions. The basis of such an imaginary contains the confrontation of rising xenophobic nationalism, an economic programme that addresses housing and basic material needs and includes the promotion of the foundational economy (Foundational Economy Collective, 2018). The second element refers to the democratic dimension of ideology. As democratic deficit spreads over all scales: the EU, national, regional and local neighbourhood level, structural changes will need to intersect with the democratisation of practices at all these levels.

To conclude, the book raises a number of questions that are related to debates on current processes of political and ideological pressures in the seemingly technical nature of the planning profession. Even though the study is applied to the UK context, the volume offers a thorough method of analysis in several ways, which might be fruitful also to think about urban planning through elsewhere (cf. BODNÁR, J. 2001; ROBINSON, J. 2016; ROY, A. 2016). One of the major strengths of the book lies in its *long durée* analysis, which makes it possible to highlight larger structural changes and the space-producing logic of capitalism's different cycles. It reveals how changing institutional arrangements and discourses permeate different scales, and how they brought closer together Left and Right ideologies through entrepreneurial strategies in urban regeneration. As it has already been observed (HUBBARD, P. and HALL, T. 1998), the entrepreneurial turn offered the local cooperation by the development of local identity for the left, while it supported the belief in the power of the private sector to achieve economic and social benefits on the right. Second, the book did a great effort in untangling the material-discursive nature of planning practices and how these features define the functioning of planning in political economy and social life. Describing this dual nature of planning in a multi-scalar approach adds a substantial layer to the debate about how the urban form comes about.

Finally, the book can be seen as a somewhat cautious Trojan horse for a cultural political economy of planning – keeping distance from more complex theoretical considerations – but much less hesitant in pointing out ways forward. In times of the eruption of the global COVID-19 pandemic, when a sudden macro-structural destabilisation followed, opportunity has also risen to

the victims of systemic failures to open up to and experiment with new, community-based actions towards a long-term solution to both economic and ecological problems. Society across the globe responded to the crisis of welfare, capitalism, and the climate with self-organisation and mutual assistance based on solidarity alternatives. The pandemic has once again highlighted dysfunctional processes of economic insecurity, increasingly precarious livelihoods and housing conditions, and even a more widespread care and food crisis, to which only a socialist-based green and feminist ideological education could serve as a panacea.

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